

# Preface

On 2nd November 1939, Prof. Dr Ludwig Mühlhausen of the Friedrich Wilhelms University of Berlin received a letter from the Department of the Taoiseach, Dublin:

Dear Sir,

I received your book “Zehn irische Volkserzählungen aus Süd-Donegal.” I am extremely grateful to you. I was happy to see that the tales were rendered in German.

With every good wish,

Éamon de Valera.<sup>1</sup>

This communication marked the commendation of the Irish government of the efforts that Mühlhausen, a German scholar in the field of Celtic Studies, undertook in order to bring to completion some of the findings of his research trip to Teelin (Donegal) carried out between 25 July – 11 October 1937. One should note the date of the letter.<sup>2</sup> However, not overemphasising its importance, I believe de Valera expressed his respect for Mühlhausen’s efforts in making the specimens of Donegal oral tradition available to a wider German academia and general public.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 Roinn an Taoisigh  
Baile Átha Cliath  
2adh Samhain, 1939.  
A Chara,  
Fuair eas do leabhar “Zehn irische Volkserzählungen aus Süd-Donegal”. Táim ana-bhuidheach díot. Do bhí áthas orm d’fheiscint gur cuireadh leagan Gearmáinise ar na sgéalta.  
Is mise, le meas,  
Éamon de Valera  
(Mn 4, Box 7)
  - 2 The fact that the Prime Minister of Ireland, a country that was neutral during World War II, arranged for correspondence to be sent to a German Professor in Berlin is remarkable. The invasion of Poland by Germany, as well as the United Kingdom and France’s declaration of war, had already happened two months prior to that, while the Soviet Union attacked Finland.
  - 3 German translations of the Irish folktales were few and far between (Müller-Lisowski 1923), and the personal interest of de Valera in the collection of Irish folklore and its popularisation is widely known and can be vouched for by the financial support given to the Irish Folklore Commission (Briody 2010), the state project to “deal with the body of folklore, which... we should set about collecting as quickly as possible while it was still in a fairly pure form” (de Valera, cit. from Moynihan 1980: 438).

In contrast to his mentors who specialised in the field of Old Irish language and literature at the Celtic departments of Leipzig, Bonn and Berlin,<sup>4</sup> Mühlhausen chose to extend his academic interest from the Celtic philology to the Irish oral tradition, yet his *Ten Irish Folk Narratives from South Donegal* (*Zehn irische Volkserzählungen aus Süd-Donegal*) remains relatively unknown to the specialists in the field of Irish folklore and ethnology.<sup>5</sup>

However, the ideas outlined by Mühlhausen in this publication, as well as the stories themselves collected for the book, are worthy of careful examination. What is more intriguing is the story that he wrote down, but decided not to publish, and his lack of interest in devoting any further attention to it.

## 1. Does the origin of ‘The Tale of the King of Greece’ lie in the Irish oral tradition, or was the story adapted from *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* version available in print?

‘The Tale of the King of Greece’ (‘*Scéal Rí na Gréige*’), a previously unpublished Donegal variant of ATU International Folktale Type 707 ‘The Three Golden Children’ recorded by Mühlhausen from Séamus Ó Caiside, is at the focus of attention in this book. Although versions of the tale existed throughout Ireland, some of which will be discussed below, I propose to demonstrate that the tale travelled to Ireland from abroad.

I will seek the origin of the text in the adaptations of Oriental tales entitled *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, first recorded in France in the eighteenth century by Antoine Galland (1704–1717) from his Syrian informant Hannā Diyāb, and subsequently rendered into English by Burton, Lane and Lang, who were responsible for the text reaching Ireland, disseminated across the island orally, but more so via the medium of print.

This tale enjoyed an enormous popularity in Europe — not only due to its provenance in the above-mentioned translations, but also due to its earlier occurrence in the sixteenth-century Italian collection of folktales by Giovanni

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4 These include Rudolf Thurneysen (Tristram 1998) and Ernst Windisch (Maier 2013), as well as his predecessors at the post of Professor of Celtic Studies at the Friedrich Wilhelms University of Berlin (from 1949, Humboldt University of Berlin), Kuno Meyer (Meyer’s classical biography by Ó Lúing 1991 has now been complemented and expanded by Maier 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017) and Julius Pokorny (Ó Dochartaigh 2003, 2004). On Celtic Studies in Germany in the period after World War I, see Lerchenmüller 1997: 165–410, 2002.

5 Mühlhausen was mostly known as the scholar of Medieval Welsh language and literature due to his 1925 publication of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. The second edition of the work was published by S. Zimmer in 1988 to mark the centenary of Mühlhausen’s birthday.

Francesco ('Gianfrancesco') Straparola<sup>6</sup> and its later reworking in the celebrated Grimm brothers' collection.<sup>7</sup>

The Donegal version of the tale was written down from oral dictation, subsequently abandoned in the archive and left unpublished for more than eighty years. My goal is to present the text to a wider public, by making it available to the learners of the Irish language as well as by presenting the nuances and variations of its spelling for more advanced specialists without losing the interest of audiences not necessarily interested in the text's linguistic aspect. Besides, the wider context in which the Donegal tale appears will show the breadth and scope that exist for the study of a folklore text in respect of its origin, message and dissemination.

These vernacular oral narratives deeply rooted in the traditional community existed in rural Ireland alongside printed texts available in newspapers, chapbooks and pamphlets — the latter being products of the industrialised society of the late nineteenth – early twentieth century. Traditionally, stories were reproduced from the storyteller's memory for the audience. The situation radically changed with the introduction of the printed medium that facilitated the reading of tales aloud — a different form of folktale performance for the nineteenth-century Irish audience. It is known that Gaelic manuscripts were read aloud during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in Munster and in the province of Ulster, and in this way many heroic and Fenian tales entered the oral tradition.<sup>8</sup> However, growing literacy in English among native Irish speakers and dissemination of printed media in rural areas led to the

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6 In Chapter 4, I will discuss the hypothesis advanced by Bottigheimer (2005; 2014), who argued that the tale '*Histoire des deux soeurs jalouses de leur cadette*' ('History of two sisters who were jealous of their younger sister') was based on the seventeenth-century French translation of Straparola's tale of Ancilotto under a new title of '*Lancelot, roi de Provins*'.

7 On the nineteenth-century versions of ATU 707 in Czech, Slovak and Bulgarian traditions, see Horálek 1968, who indicated their literary origin; on the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century versions of ATU 707 collected in Russia, see Anichkova 1927, Azadovskij 1937 and Oranskij 1970, who pointed out that a literary version of the tale created by Alexander Pushkin ('*Skazka o tsare Saltane*') exerted a marked influence on the recorded oral variants — proposing that Pushkin was also inspired by literary sources. Holbek (1987: 603) pointed at nine versions of ATU 707 recorded in Denmark: "not all of them have been inspected, but the three printed records at least clearly depend on the *Arabian Nights*".

8 See, for instance, Bruford (1969: 55–68, chapter 6, 'Readers and story-tellers', esp. 59): "Irish manuscripts were chiefly transcribed by Schoolmasters and clever Irishians, to whom they were lent by the possessors for the purpose. It was the custom in some districts to have them read in certain houses, on occasions when numbers were collected in the evenings at some business or employment... People became so familiar with these tales and stories, that many were able to recite them to their neighbours without the aid of any book, but now this practice has nearly passed away in Ulster... By 1874 there were hardly any MSS. to read from". See also Zimmermann 2001: 79–121.

enrichment of the store of traditional motifs and genres — now that the storytellers drew their inspiration from chapbooks and printed collections, their perspective expanded (and shifted) from vernacular sources of heroic nature to international folktale.<sup>9</sup>

The interdependence of the oral and printed versions of the tale will be our focus: how close is the printed version to the one dictated by the storyteller? How did the German scholar react to the adapted version crafted by a literate Irish-speaking storyteller after his reading of the tale in English? In what way did such stories enter the oral medium and how did they become intertwined with the oral heritage of the Gaelic-speaking communities throughout Ireland? These and other questions will be asked and answered throughout the book.

## 2. ‘The Tale of the King of Greece’: A case study of the Irish ecotype of ATU International Folktale Type 707 ‘Three Golden Children’

The study stems from a small episode in the life of the Donegal fishing village of Teelin in September 1937,<sup>10</sup> which, however small and insignificant it may

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9 In this vein, it is worth referring to the study of the influence of the chapbooks on mummery and the seasonal performances of Christmas plays in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland (Smith and Preston 2000) that provides a typologically close parallel to the influence of chapbooks on the oral tradition. As far as the latter is concerned, Jackson (1936: 282) listed a number of chapbooks (including *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*) which in his view “have certainly been an important factor in spreading stories”.

10 “Despite the apparent remoteness of the place due to the rugged landscape and lack of roads, Glencolumcille had substantial links with the wider world. From 1327 to 1568, Teelin was prominently featured as an important fishery” (Tucker 2013: 217). Accounts from 1729 and 1776 attest that Teelin was an important fishery, exporting herring in 100-ton boats owned by the local landlord to England. At the end of the Napoleonic wars, this trade ended and by 1823, the international herring industry had collapsed, and only local traditional fishing continued (*ibid.*). Teelin once again ceased to be a traditional fishing village in 1893 when, in an attempt to restore the area’s fishing industry, the so-called Congested Districts Board of Ireland was established. Its purpose was to provide employment and contest the poverty in the most deprived areas of the country (see discussion of Teelin’s local economy transformation between 1881 and 1920 in Tucker 1999). According to C. Breathnach (2005: 88), “co. Donegal had twenty one congested districts, all of them were dependent on agriculture; seventeen were also maritime, meaning they had a shoreline. Teelin was the only northern district where whole families were engaged solely in fishing, and its baseline report notes the many disincentives to engage in fishing on a full-time basis — from the paucity of equipment in use, to how hard the whole family had to work. At Teelin there were usually two takes of fish a day. Men rowed out to their lines at 7 a.m. (they would have been set the previous evening about 4 or 5 p.m.) each line holding about sixty hooks baited with cuts of herring; as they were hauled in, the fish was unhooked and thrown to the bottom of the boat. Lines were then recoiled in the basket but were often so twisted that it took the men hours to unravel them. After the catch was taken in,

seem, must have major ramifications for our understanding of the influences that shaped, contexts in which existed, and directions that led, the development of the vernacular oral tradition of Ireland.

The Irish oral tradition has previously been viewed as laid back and immersed in time, owing its rich content to the generations of storytellers who learned their trade from their forefathers, the method aptly described in the Irish phrase ‘*ó ghlúin go glúin*’ (lit. ‘from knee to knee’, fig. ‘from generation to generation’), their ancestry ideally going back to medieval times, the golden age of Gaelic civilisation.<sup>11</sup>

Since then, this perspective on the tradition has changed, and it has been described as one that was able to adapt and transform itself when and where necessary. However, previous studies of adaptations of foreign sources on Irish soil have not dealt with the introduction of a tale that entered Irish oral tradition through its adaptation into Irish from the English version available originally in print. The book will hopefully fill a lacuna that exists in our understanding of the development of an international folktale type in Ireland in terms of its form, context and dissemination. The book presents a case study of the so-called ATU 707 ‘Three Golden Children’ Irish ecotype, including its

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the lines sorted and new ones set; they still had to row four miles home, which meant reaching Teelin about midnight.” Many Teelin storytellers were professional fishermen. Ó hEochaidh (NFC M 1118, 70–72; see also Ó Tiarnaigh 2015: 418–424) reported that long fishing nights provided an ideal context for storytelling performance similar to the one experienced at the traditional storytelling sessions in ‘the houses for entertainment’ (Ir. *tithe airneáin*). The continuity of local storytelling right into the 1970s — despite the decline of the language and the collapse of the *tithe airneáin* tradition — was probably due to the fact that the storytelling could have still been practised while fishing. I refer the interested reader to Taylor (1995), who presents a nuanced anthropological and ethnological history of Teelin from the early 1800s down to the late 1980s.

- 11 This view was expressed by Delargy in his John Rhŷs Memorial lecture presented to the British Academy, published as *The Gaelic Story-teller, with Some Notes on Gaelic Folk-Tales* in 1946: “the written saga of the manuscript is but a pale ghost of the tale that once was told, and to which men listened with rapt attention and delight; and the personality and polished artistry of that artificer of narrative prose... can only be guessed at by... hearing the living voice of the modern reciter of Irish hero- and wonder-tale, the lineal descendant of the storyteller of a thousand years ago” (p. 9). This view was critiqued, inter alia, by Nady (1987: 10–11), Ó Cruaioich (2003: 18) and most recently Briody (2013; 2017). Intriguingly, contradicting Delargy’s proposal by almost fifteen years and pre-empting the theory developed by A. Bruford (1969) by almost half a century, R. Thurneysen put forward a view that such stories were not that old, but rather depended on the late manuscript tradition: “The manner, in fact, in which the Irish tales of old and modern times had often been treated did not satisfy my mind. It is frequently assumed that modern folklore (in which Ireland is so excessively rich) preserves old tradition, not to be found in any written documents. This is partially true. But you cannot invert the sentence and conclude that most of the modern tales are of remote antiquity... It occurred to me that many of the modern folk-tales are developments of stories that are found in a somewhat similar form, not in the old, but in the youngest of Irish manuscripts. They were evidently not taken down from oral tradition, but developed from written sources” (Thurneysen 1930: 30–31).

variants, some of which, I believe, were adapted from the foreign counterpart available in print.

The events in the run-up to the tale's collector's visit to Ireland, along with an overview of the data collected during his trip, provide the study with a historical and ethnographical context and are discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. The Irish ecotypes of ATU 707 are discussed from a comparative point of view, along with an examining of tale type's dissemination in the country from the 1880s to the 1930s in Chapter 3; appendix 6 complements the Chapter, presenting the list of the ecotypes' individual versions, their bibliographic details and the maps with such locations where the variants were recorded. Chapters 4 and 5 will take an international perspective into discussion and will assess how the popular publications of *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* and the Grimm Brothers' *Children and Household Stories* influenced the formulation of a specific ATU 707 Irish ecotype. The book follows the methodology of critical textual analysis: Chapters 3–5 serve as the extensive commentary to the Modern Irish text of the tale, with the dialectal readings appearing in footnotes, and accompanied by its translation into English and German in appendix 1. A list of the folklore motifs found in a number of variants discussed in the book is found in appendix 2. The list of *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* publications available in Ireland in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century is included in appendix 3. Appendix 4 presents the transcriptions of four Galway variants discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, accompanied by their translation into English. The book is accompanied by an index that names the persons, organisations and places, the titles of the tales and compositions mentioned throughout, and a bibliography.